



PHOTO: STAR
Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar (Third from left) hands over the champions trophy to Bangladesh Army, winners of the Chowdhury Group Shaheed Smriti Hockey Competition at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

REALITY CHECK FOR INDIA

Sachin to play Kiwi warm-up today

CRICINFO, Chennai

At the very last chance to test their combination before the World Cup, India will field their full-strength batting line-up in a 50-over game for the first time in 15 months. The batsmen had faltered against Australia on Sunday but will be bolstered by the return of Sachin Tendulkar against New Zealand in Chennai.

Tendulkar had missed that warm-up game because of a niggle but will play on Wednesday, in what will be his third one-day match since his double-century against South Africa in Gwalior a year ago. He had a long batting session on Tuesday morning during India's practice, and also spent time working on his fielding, showing no signs of the hamstring injury that forced him to return home midway through the one-day series in South Africa a month ago.

Tendulkar will displace Gautam Gambhir from the top of the order to No. 3, the position at which Virat Kohli had much of his recent success. Kohli's form swept him to second spot in the ICC one-day rankings, but even that hasn't ensured him a place in the starting line-up. Wednesday's game will give Kohli a chance to show his prowess lower down the order, perhaps at No. 6, a position where another contender, Suresh Raina, is considered a better bet.

The other player in India's squad to miss the first warm-up, Zaheer Khan, will sit out the sold-out game against New Zealand as well. Captain MS Dhoni was quick to emphasise that Zaheer, who has been injury prone, would be fit in time for the World Cup opener against Bangladesh on February 19. "He has a very, very mild groin strain, nothing to worry about," Dhoni said. "We can give him rest, so we are giving him rest, and

will use him when the proper tournament starts."

Zaheer didn't bowl in the nets on Tuesday, though he batted for 45-minutes and also tested himself with a series of short sprints under the supervision of physiotherapist Nitin Patel. Zaheer is the only fast bowler guaranteed a starting place, and his absence gives the others -- Ashish Nehra, Sreesanth and Munaf Patel -- who had little work against Australia another opportunity to audition for the World Cup.

India had sneaked to victory two days ago despite the below-par score and the initial ineffectiveness of the seamers because their spinners demolished the Australian batting. Piyush Chawla, the legspinner who was the most debated selection in India's World Cup squad, was the star, ripping out the middle-order during a spell of 5-0-9-4. Under Dhoni, India have generally played three-seamers and one-specialist spinner, with a spinning allrounder and part-timers combining for the remaining ten overs. Another strong performance from Chawla will leave Dhoni pondering the inclusion of two specialist slow bowlers, especially on turning tracks, and only two quicks.

In the previous World Cup tune-up at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, South Africa had crushed Zimbabwe by eight wickets after bundling them out for 152. Their captain, Graeme Smith, had been critical of the pitch, terming it "slow and dead" and "under-prepared", and called for better surfaces in the actual tournament. Dhoni wasn't sure how the Chennai track would play but urged the Indian side to lift their performance. "We need to pick up a bit of intensity on the field," he said. "This being the last warm-up game, the intensity should be a bit up on the field [compared to the game against Australia]."

Bartoli back with a bang

APP, Dubai

Marion Bartoli, who thought she might be out for six weeks after injuring her calf at the Australian Open, returned after only four with a morale-boosting first round win at the Dubai Open on Monday.

The former Wimbledon finalist from France overcame Kimiko Date-Krumm, the former Wimbledon semi-finalist from Japan, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 after saving three set points in the first set.

Even though that swung the match Bartoli's way, Date-Krumm still made a break-back in the second set and, at the age of 40, played so many spirited rallies that the two-set contest went well over two hours.

It was also an unusual encounter in that both players showed ambidextrous abilities -- Bartoli striking the ball with two hands on both wings, and Date-Krumm occasionally using her left hand to return a wide ball on her double-handed backhand side.

"It's a great relief to come up with a win," Bartoli said. "For two weeks I was on crutches.

with three stairs, so I couldn't climb the stairs. It was quite a bad injury."

There was absolutely no legacy from that, except that Bartoli appeared to have spent some of her time away from the tour losing weight and getting fitter.

Indeed, she spent significant amounts of the match containing or defending -- not normally her forte -- and

Star behind

FROM PAGE 16

Cheema migrated to Canada in early 2000, and feels proud to be part of the Canadian cricket team, and even dreams of beating Pakistan, his country of birth, in the World Cup group match.

"I am living in Canada for more than 10 years now and have been playing for Canada, which I take pride in. So, I don't hope to go back to Pakistan anymore.

"You can't compare your home country with other nations. Thing is that any team, any country you play for is your team and your country and I want to win for Canada, even against Pakistan," said Cheema, whose sees Imran Khan as his cricketing idol and is inspired by everything Imran says.

played several of the most crucial points of the tie-break with consistency and tenacity.

During that Bartoli had landed in trouble by serving a double fault to go three points to four down, but after trailing 4-6 she saved two set points, first producing a fine backhand drive winner and then a steady enough second serve to induce Date-Krumm to return into the net.

England are already without prolific batsman Eoin Morgan, who was forced out of the tournament with a broken finger.

But Bell insists England can thrive in such adversity and bounce back from their 6-1 mauling at the hands of Australia in the recent one-day series.

"We have a few niggles, but we hope everyone is coming along in time for the World Cup," said the batsman.

"It is not ideal for us. But we'll get on with it -- we knew that was the case coming here. We'll have 11 fit guys for tomorrow and will be ready to go.

"OK, we've got a few injuries. But if our mindset is right about these warm-up games it will hold us in very good stead for this World Cup."

BFF XI, U-23 draw blank

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-23 football team, preparing for the upcoming Olympic qualifiers, played a practice match with BFF XI at BKSP yesterday. The match ended 0-0.

Both BFF XI and U-23 side have few players from the national side. While the senior players of the national side like goalkeeper Aminul Haque, midfielder Mehedi Haasn and strikers Abdul Baten Kamal and Shakil Ahmed played for the BFF XI, the U-23 side consisted young and promising national players like Mithuin Chowdhury, Chowmrin Rakhain and Tawhidul Alam Shabuz.

Bell's Broad expectation

APP, Dhaka

England batsman Ian Bell backed jinxed teammate Stuart Broad to make a memorable World Cup impact despite the key paceman's recent struggles with injury and sickness.

Broad, whose Ashes campaign ended after the second Test because of a stomach injury, has now fallen ill and will miss England's warm-up match against Canada in Dhaka on Wednesday.

With Tim Bresnan also out with a calf injury, England's resources are so thin that they are seeking permission to allow Chris Tremlett, who was not part of the 15-man squad, to feature in the game.

"Obviously, Broad's not feeling too good, but I'm sure over the next couple of days he'll be back on his feet," said Bell on Tuesday.

"He's come down with something, but he'll be fine and as energetic as anyone -- having missed a fair bit of the winter -- to really make a statement in this World Cup. We're looking forward to getting him back on the field."

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No one picks a winner

APP, Dhaka



Six weeks of World Cup action gets underway on Saturday with the 2011 tournament tipped to be the most open in history.

Four years ago in the Caribbean, Australia marched relentlessly towards a historic third successive title while others were playing catch-up. But how times have changed.

Former Australia captain Ian Chappell says India, Sri Lanka, Ashes-winning England, South Africa and Australia are strong contenders this time.

"Unlike the 2007 tournament where it was simply a matter of: 'Who'll meet Australia in the final?' this time the defending champions are not favourites," Chappell wrote in a recent column.

With the unpredictable, but hugely talented, Pakistanis also in the mix alongside two-time champions West Indies and New Zealand, the race for the title is wide open.

"This could be anyone's tournament," Kapil Dev, India's World Cup-winning captain in 1983, told AFP.

"The conditions will favour teams from the subcontinent, but don't write off other sides. They have all played enough in this part of the world to know what awaits them."

Australia have dominated the World Cup stage in spectacular fashion, winning in 1999, 2003 and 2007 to add to their first success under Allan Border in 1987.

They have shed much of their prowess following the retirement of match-winners Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath, Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist and Andrew Symonds.

But they have proved they are still a force in limited-overs cricket by clinching a recent home one-day series

against England after losing the Ashes.

Their preparations suffered a twin blow when reliable middle-order batsman Mike Hussey and off-spinner Nathan Hauritz were ruled out of the tournament due to injuries.

Australia also had a wake-up call when they lost their opening warm-up match against India, undone by spin on a turning track. In contrast, Sri Lanka and South Africa started with big wins in practice games.

Injuries to key players have also affected other sides, with England attacking batsman Eoin Morgan, India paceman Praveen Kumar and Pakistan seamer Sohail Tanveer all out of the tournament.

England captain Andrew Strauss was upbeat ahead of the event.

"We really feel we can do very well. We are excited about it. We are here to win it, obviously -- no doubt about that. I think we feel like we have got excellent chance," he said.

Fans' expectations will be sky-high in India, but captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said his team were well prepared to cope with pressure.

"We have a very experienced team. Most of the guys have been there for five to seven years and know how to handle pressure," said Dhoni.

Adding to the excitement is the format where teams face sudden-death after the preliminary league. The second round format was revived to ensure a team plays a minimum of six matches even if they do not make the next round.

In the Caribbean, crowd-pullers India and Pakistan went out of the reckoning after just three matches as they failed to enter the second round and organisers have made sure it is not repeated.

"I will not be honest if I say 'no'," tournament director Ratnakar Shetty said when asked if the format had been

designed to favour a top team like India.

"Economically, we all know that India is the financial powerhouse of cricket."

Australia have been drawn with Sri Lanka, Pakistan, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Canada and Kenya in Group A, while India, Bangladesh, England, South Africa, West Indies, Ireland and the Netherlands are in a relatively tougher Group B.

The four top sides from each group will advance to the quarterfinals.

India are using eight Test venues for their 29 matches, but were hit by problems in a worrying echo of the troubles which dogged the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi.

The refurbishment work on the Eden Gardens in Kolkata was so far behind schedule that the venue's first game -- between India and England -- has had to be moved to Bangalore.

The Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, venue for the final on April 2, has been reconstructed and passed the pitch test.

Sri Lanka's 12 matches will be held at three venues, including two brand new 25,000-seater stadiums in Pallekele near the hill resort of Kandy and Hambantota in the deep south.

The eight games allotted to Bangladesh will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on the outskirts of Dhaka and the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

The World Cup contenders are set for a financial bonanza with a record prize purse of 8 million dollars on offer, a rise of 3 million dollars from the previous edition.

The winners receive 3.25 million dollars -- Australia took home 2.2 million dollars in 2007 -- while the losing finalists get 1.5 million dollars.

Street has its own rules

APP, New Delhi



During the cricket World Cup, millions of youngsters across South Asia will try to copy their heroes at games played in streets and parks -- but any umpire would be appalled at their bowling.

Most street cricketers bowl by "chucking" the ball with a bent elbow in a style banned by the sport's rulers, and coaches despair that they are missing out on talent from the breeding grounds of village and back-alley cricket.

Many brilliant young cricketers who are the best bowlers in their local street games -- often seriously competitive events -- need to be completely re-taught if they are to progress to league or professional matches.

"A lot of players in the street cricket do chuck the ball," said Amrit Mathur, chief operating officer of the Delhi Daredevils Twenty20 side, and a former senior official at the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"They don't care that the bowler's arm should be straight. It is very difficult to adjust and learn again. It depends on how old you are.

"Like a disease, if it is detected early there is a better chance to correct it. At the age of 18, it is too late."

Mathur, who oversees a youth talent-spotting programme in Delhi, said that chucking has filtered upwards from the neighbourhood games played on any open patch of rough ground across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"Street players are trying to bring suspect bowling actions into the organised game, which is causing concern to the cricket board," he told AFP. "The authorities are making a major effort to put a stop to it."

Mathur said the problem is creating a divide between how young, poor people play cricket in the subcontinent, and the official sport.

"Thirty years ago, boys didn't chuck in street cricket," he said.

"Some of the better-off or more talented kids will go to a club or school where there is a coach to guide and rectify. But re-modelling a bowling action is often impossible, even when the player is still in their teens."

Mohnish Parmar, from Gujarat state in eastern India, is just one young man who has struggled with his action. He was targeted by national scouts after picking up a huge number of wickets in local cricket.

Experts had concerns over his bent-arm bowling and sent him to the elite training academy, where he altered his style. He quickly lost effectiveness and

has fought to take wickets without returning to his previous "illegal" action.

Parmar, now 22, still plays state cricket for Gujarat but the international career that once beckoned seems to have slipped away.

For fans around the world, the all-consuming love of cricket in India and other south Asian nations is a joy to see with boys playing everywhere with just a plank of wood for a bat, bricks as a wicket, and a tennis ball.

However for noted television commentator Harsha Bhogle, the tennis ball itself is one of the problems.

"A tennis ball travels so slowly through the air that batsmen have too much time in street cricket," he said. "Much better and faster to chuck it -- that is where this all starts."

Bhogle added that "chucking" controversies at the top of the sport had also sent the wrong message.

Sri Lankan spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan has had his unique action called as "no balls" by umpires but it was later passed by biomechanical tests -- a decision many observers felt bent the rules.

Harbhajan Singh of India and Shoaib Malik of Pakistan are two other superstar cricketers who have been under scrutiny as "chuckers" but not stopped from playing.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Lobbying grp.
4 Fusses
8 Belgrade native
12 Literary collection
13 1942 vessel
14 "Arrivederci"
15 Remove (from)
17 Jason's ship
18 Injure
19 Bedtime story?
20 Mail unit
22 Entreaty
24 Calm before the storm
25 Disadvantage
29 Japanese 34-Down
30 Sycophant
31 That girl
32 Spine
34 Unescorted, in a way
35 "Listen!"

DOWN
36 Mythical man-goats
37 Grinding tooth
40 Heart of the matter
41 Frenzied
42 Fool
46 Actress
47 Ca-boose's place
48 Old soap ingredient
49 Tackles' team-mates
50 Bohemian
51 Longing

22 Mischievous act
23 Stow cargo
25 Entrance
26 With shrewdness
27 Charlie of whodunits
28 Bar supply
30 Ski lift type
33 Light-colored uniforms
34 Cumberbund, e.g.
36 Raging hot
37 Partner
38 Portent
39 Parliamentary address
40 Summer-time pest
42 Push-up provider
43 "the fields we go"
44 Sailor's assent
45 Lair

Solution time: 25 mins.

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FLUE SIN CENT
FLOREGO DIOR
PAPERTRAIL
FAILS DIS TRY
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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DO YOU SUPPOSE THAT THE PREFERRED FRUIT OF MANY FAST AFRICAN MAMMALS IS ANTELOPE CANTALOUPE? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals I